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AUTHOR	Kariuki, Patrick; Wilson, Lisa
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of middle school students' gender on their illustration of a gender-neutral historical image and on their attitude toward social studies. The sample consisted of 15 males and 15 females randomly selected from each of grades 5, 6, 7, and 8. Data collection instruments included a Likert-type questionnaire and a creative/constructive projection test. Data analysis used the t-test for independent means. Results indicate a significant difference between genders in their tendency to draw figures of the participant's own gender, with both genders drawing mostly make figures. Results also indicate a significant difference in attitude only in the fifth grade group. Recommendations included that educators encompass more female contributions in their curricula and attempt to raise student attitudes toward social studies. (Contains 2 tables and 13 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Running head: GENDER AND ATTITUDE

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ED 482 521

The Effect of Students' Gender on Attitude Toward Social Studies and the Illustration Of Historical Images at a Selected Middle School

Patrick Kariuki

And

Lisa Wilson

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine effects of middle school students' gender on their illustration of a gender-neutral historical image and on their attitude toward social studies. The sample consisted of 15 males and 15 females randomly selected from each of grades 5, 6, 7, and 8. Data collection instruments included a Likert-type opinionnaire and a creative/constructive projection test. Data analysis used t-test for independent means. Results indicated a significant difference between genders in their tendency to draw figures of the participant's own gender, with both genders drawing mostly male figures. Results also indicated a significant difference in attitude only in the fifth grade group. Recommendations included educators encompass more female contributions into their curriculum and raise student attitudes toward social studies.

Review of Literature

The power of history to shape people's understanding of the world has long been recognized. In her 1982 presidential address to the Organization of American Historians, Gerda Lerner emphasized the importance of history for self-identity: "Women's history is a tool for allowing us to see the past whole and entire" (Brandt, 1989).

Students come to understand the remarkably complex question, "What is history?" in a variety of ways. Teachers, parents, classmates, and the media all play a role in helping students construct a mental representation of the discipline (Paxton, 1999). Studies have demonstrated that American students tend to regard history as an accumulation of facts to be archived in the course of reading and then cut and pasted together in the process of writing. Relatively little thought is given to the subject matter (Paxton, 1999; Wineburg, 1999).

Drawing

Most educators seem to think that a child's pictorialism is an attempt to draw personal experiences. Thus the child's symbol for Human is perceived as an attempted self-portrait or as a portrait of another person (Kellogg, 1970). Lowenfeld viewed children's art as documents that reveal child

personality (as cited in Kellogg, 1970). Children create or borrow symbols to use for representation of objects. How they see the objects and how they feel about them determine the symbols they use (Kellogg, 1970).

The child's drawing of any object reveals the discriminations she/he has made about that object as belonging to a class as a concept. Further, her/his concept of a frequently experienced object, such as a human being, becomes a useful index to the growing complexity of her/his concepts generally (Harris, 1963). Children of age five to eight, when asked to draw a person, draw their own sex first in about eighty percent of the cases. After age eight, the percentage of boys drawing males rises, and the percentage of girls drawing females falls. The operation of a social stereotype is a possible explanation. Social values in Western culture emphasize the male role (Harris, 1963; Thomas & Silk, 1990).

The Goodenough Intelligence Quotient postulated that children's drawings are directly expressive of their concept of the topic concerned (Goodenough, 1926). Other studies using the "draw-a-person" test have repeatedly shown that children have a preference for drawing figures of their own sex (Machover, 1949; Koppitz, 1968). This preference for

drawing own-sex figures is interpreted as a consequence of children identifying with their own gender (Thomas & Silk, 1990).

Attitude

In recent years there has been an increased interest in the measurement and understanding of attitudes toward school and subject matters. However, few studies exist that have focused on the attitudes of students toward social studies (Corbin, 1994; Haladyna, Shaughnessy, & Olsen, 1979; Shaughnessy & Haladyna, 1985; Alvermann & Commeyras, 1994; Gabella, 1995). Attitudes toward social studies were quite low relative to attitudes toward other subject matters. Not only were social studies attitudes low, but a decline has been observed from grades four through eight, with no gender differences reported (Corbin, 1994; Haladyna et al., 1979; Shaughnessy, & Olsen, 1979; Shaughnessy & Haladyna, 1985). The issue of gender and students' historical understanding has received attention in only a few studies (Alvermann & Commeyras, 1994; Gabella, 1995).

Textbooks and Curriculum

All students come to school with partial knowledges. In some ways that knowledge is often a misconception, a knowledge

of stereotypes and myths learned from the media, family, peers and so forth (Kumashiro, 2001; Shaughnessy & Haladyna, 1985). School curriculum does little to address partial knowledges. When U.S. history focuses on political leaders, military conflicts, and industrial inventors, the voices, experiences, and perspectives of only certain male-dominated groups in society are included. Left silent or pushed to the margins are such topics as immigration, the gendered division of labor, and civil rights movements that can reveal the roles that women and other minorities have played in U.S. history. This implies that "history" consists of merely facts, not readings or interpretations of events (Kumashiro, 2001; Wineburg, 1999). Focusing exclusively on memorizing historical facts is a detriment to student interest and attitude (Paxton, 1999).

For school children, the most common historical text is the history or social studies textbook, both the backbone of the curriculum and the source of most information. The way things are told in the textbook is generally taught as the way things were (Paxton, 1999; Gabella, 1994; Wineburg, 1999).

Students and teachers alike often find social studies textbooks dull. School textbooks need not be exciting to

students to be educative. Texts tend to cover large swaths of history, serving as introductions in survey courses, with many facts and dates and few opinions or discussions (Paxton, 1999).

Teachers

Teachers play a critical role in the learning of social studies. The power of expert teaching should never be underestimated. The demands of an expansive curriculum and the need to maintain classroom control often compel teachers to simplify course content (Gardner, 1994).

Teacher factors, such as commitment to help students learn, enthusiasm, and the provision of individual attention, have been found to be highly related to attitude (Shaughnessy & Haladyna, 1985). Students appear to be greatly affected by the teachers who like their subject matter, who know about their subject matter, and who communicate this positive feeling to their students (Haladyna et al., 1979). Studies by Amatora (1952), Symonds (1955), and Tuckman and Oliver (1968) have shown that students in the middle grades were able to discriminate between their teachers with regard to the quality of teacher-pupil interaction (as cited by Benninga, Guskey, & Thornburg, 1981).

Measures of teacher quality as perceived by students are highly related to their attitude toward social studies (Haladyna et al., 1982). Reinforcing the student refers to the tendency of the teacher to offer kind words when performance is good. Teacher support indicates that the teacher is willing to help that student individually, to listen, to react, and to express individual concern (Haladyna et al., 1979).

Women in the Curriculum

The "great women" model of teaching is not far removed from the "great man" theory. Most social studies teachers soon realize that students are usually more fascinated by individuals from the past than by groups, classes, or cultures. The case remains that students for the most part are more curious about the doings of Hitler, Napoleon, or Catherine the Great than of some nebulous entity called "the working class" or "the aristocracy." The obsession with the doings of the "great" conceals more than it reveals about the people who inhabit that very foreign country, the past (Flaherty, 1989).

The history of male-female relations over the centuries has been the history of patriarchy, sexism, misogyny, and

gender-based oppression and discrimination, thus the "women as victims" model (Flaherty, 1989). The great majority of women over time have been as much the victims of injustice and atrocities as have blacks, Jews, peasants, and workers (Kumashiro, 2001). Students should know and be able to place the current struggles for sexual equality within the broader context of male dominance and female subordination that span the course of human history. The history of female defiance of oppression and victimization provides an important balance to the widely held belief that women have universally been the objects of male domination (Flaherty, 1989).

The most prevalent instructional model currently practiced in social studies classes is the third model, "women as historical supplement." In this model, women's history is included in the broader narrative, and women's experience is acknowledged. However, that history is a supplementary one, an addition to the main story, a footnote to the male history (Flaherty, 1989).

Conclusion

In conclusion of the review of related literature, research has shown that children tend to draw their own sex when asked to "draw a person." An exception occurs when girls

are prompted to draw an historical figure. The literature also has shown that attitudes toward social studies were generally lower in girls than boys. This lower attitude has been attributed to several factors, the most notable being the lack of females represented in the social studies curriculum. By inference, the lower attitude of girls and their lessened tendency to draw figures of their own sex when prompted to draw an historical figure may ultimately be attributed to the lack of female representation in the social studies curriculum. Teachers could promote attitude changes in girls with both the inclusion of more females into the curriculum and the more equitable treatment of girls in the social studies classroom.

Methodology and Procedures

The population for this study consisted of 486 students at a selected northeast Tennessee middle school, with 253 males (52%) and 233 females (48%). The middle school served grades five through eight. The students represented primarily middle-class Caucasian families residing in a rural area. The racial breakdown was 97.4% Caucasian, 0.4% African American, 1.6% Hispanic, 0.4% Asian, and 0.2% Native American. Fifty-

one percent of the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch.

The sample used for this study consisted of four groups of social studies classes. Each group consisted of two social studies classes. The groups comprised of fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Fifteen males and fifteen females were randomly selected for each grade. Therefore, the total sample consisted of 120 students.

The data collection instruments used for this study consisted of a Likert-type opinionnaire and a creative/ constructive projective test. The Likert-type opinionnaire was developed by the researcher through guidance from literature review and experts in the field. The opinionnaire was designed to measure participant attitude toward four categories: current social studies class, current social studies teacher, current social studies textbook and curriculum, and the inclusion of women in the social studies curriculum. Eight opinions were presented in each category, and students were requested to indicate whether they agreed, disagreed, or were undecided about that opinion. Participants were also asked to indicate their gender and current grade level.

The second instrument consisted of the creative/ constructive projective test, which involved drawings created by the participants. They were prompted to draw a "whole person" representing one of the following historical culture groups: ancient Egyptian, Pilgrim, and European monarch or ruler. This instrument was modeled from a study by Fournier and Wineburg (1997). The historical culture groups were chosen through the guidance of social studies teachers from two other middle schools in northeast Tennessee.

Procedures

To begin the study, permission was requested and granted from the principal to conduct research in the selected middle school. Permission was then requested and received from each of the four male social studies teachers.

The sample for study was randomly selected from two social studies classes from each of grades five, six, seven, and eight. The participants were administered the creative/constructive projective test and were advised that this was not a "drawing contest." They were also informed that not everyone had received the same form. They were requested to indicate their gender and current grade level on the form. The participants were then instructed to draw "a

whole person" representing the historical culture group printed at the top of the form. No stick figures, cartoons, or faces-only drawings would be accepted. Twenty minutes were allowed for the completion of the drawings. At the end of twenty minutes, the participants were instructed to turn the page face down.

The participants were then given the opinionnaire and were assured that their responses were important, would remain anonymous, and would not be graded. They were requested to indicate their gender and current grade level on the form. The participants were directed to mark each statement according to how they actually felt, not how they thought they might be expected to feel by either their social studies teacher or by the researcher. Fifteen minutes were allowed for the completion of the opinionnaire. At the end of fifteen minutes, the tests and the opinionnaires were collected. Each participant's test and opionionnaire were paired for analysis purpose.

Results

Two research questions were used to guide the analysis of the data. Each research question was followed by subsequent research hypotheses. Research questions 1 and 2 were analyzed

by using t-tests for independent means. All data were analyzed using a .05 level of significance.

Research Questions

1. Does middle school students' gender influence their drawing of a gender neutral historical image?
2. Does middle school students' gender influence their attitudes towards social studies?

Research question 1 was followed by four research hypotheses based on four grade levels of five, six, seven, and eight. The results for independent t-test for question 1 in regard to grade five, six, seven, and eight indicated a significant difference between males and females in their drawing of gender neutral historical image ($t(14)=-4.583$, $p=.001$; $t14)=-4.583$, $p=.001$; $t(28)=-5.821$, $p=.001$; $t(21)=-3.60$, $p=.002$ respectively). All null hypotheses were rejected. The results are displayed in Table 1.

The results for the independent t-test for research question 2 in regard to grade five indicated a significant difference between males and females attitude towards social studies($t(28)=-2.551$, $p=.002$). Therefore, the null hypothesis

was rejected. In regards to grades six, seven, and eight, there was no significant difference found between males and females attitude towards social studies. The results are indicated in Table 2.

Table 1

T-test for independent means for grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 Drawings

Gender	(M)	df	SD	t-value	Sig. (2 tailed)
			Grade 5		
Male	1.00	14	.001	-4.583	.001*
Female	1.60		.507		
			Grade 6		
Male	1.00	14	.001	-4.583	.001*
Female	1.60		.507		
			Grade 7		
Male	1.07	28	.258	-5.821	.001*
Female	1.80		.414		
			Grade 8		
Male	1.07	21	.258	-3.630	.002*
Female	1.60		.507		

Note. *p<.05., N=120

Table 2

T-test for Independent Means for 5^{th}, 6^{th}, 7^{th}, and 8^{th} grades on attitudes towards social studies

Gender	(M)	df	SD	t-value	sig. (2tailed
			Grade 5		
Male	74.53	28	9.40	-2.551	.017*
Female	82.73		8.16		
			Grade 6		
Male	84.93	28	6.15	.099	.922
Female	84.73		4.79		
			Grade 7		
Male	72.53		11.64	.440	.664
Female	70.67		11.62		
			Grade 8		
Male	71.60		7.78	.870	.392
Female	68.40		11.93		

Note. P<.05, N = 120

Discussion

Summary of Findings

Drawings of Gender-Neutral Historical Images

The first research question addressed by this study was whether middle school students' gender influences which gender they would draw when prompted to illustrate a gender-neutral historical image. A statistical comparison was performed between male and female middle school social studies students to determine whether their drawing tendencies did vary significantly by gender. The data analysis indicated a significant difference between male and female tendencies to draw figures of their own gender when prompted to illustrate a gender-neutral historical figure (ancient Egyptian, Pilgrim, or European monarch). Both genders predominantly drew male figures, regardless of grade level. One hundred percent of the males sampled in grades 5 and 6 drew male figures, and only 1 male of the 15 sampled in each of grades 7 and 8 drew females. Among each female sample group of 15, 6 girls in fifth grade (40%), 6 in sixth grade (40%), 3 in seventh grade (20%), and 6 in eighth grade (40%) drew males. This tendency agreed with the findings of a previous study by Fournier

(1991) which stated students overwhelmingly picture males when they imagine history. This might suggest that the middle school (and even elementary school) social studies curriculum is especially male-dominated. By including more women and their importance to history into the social studies curriculum, students might perceive a more gender-balanced view of history.

Attitude Towards Social Studies

The second research question addressed by this study was whether middle school students' gender influences their attitude toward social studies. A statistical comparison was performed between male and female middle school social studies students to determine whether their attitudes toward social studies did vary significantly by gender. Upon statistical comparison of male and female attitude toward social studies, a significant difference was found only in the fifth grade, where girls had the higher mean attitude score. That difference suggests that a follow-up study be done to determine the area(s) where girls have a higher or more positive attitude toward social studies than do boys. Sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students did not show a statistically significant difference between the genders in

their attitudes toward social studies. Attitude mean scores also were shown to decline in both genders as the students progressed through middle school with the exception of the sixth grade sample group. The sixth grade's positive spike in attitude could possibly be attributed to the popularity of the sixth grade social studies teacher. The overall decline from grade 5 through grade 8 in middle school students' attitudes toward social studies agrees with the findings of previous studies discussed in the literature review (Corbin, 1994; Haladyna et al., 1979; Shaughnessy, & Olsen, 1979; Shaughnessy & Haladyna, 1985).

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of middle school students' gender on their attitude toward social studies and in their illustration of gender-neutral historical images. The findings of this study were that middle school students' gender does influence their drawing of historical images, as they overwhelmingly tend to picture males when imagining history. Also found was the absence of influence by gender on student attitude except in the fifth grade sample group. However, attitude toward social studies generally declined as students progressed through middle school.

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Organization/Address: MILLIGAN COLLEGE MILLIGAN TN 37682	Telephone: (423) 461-8744	FAX: 423-461-8777
	E-Mail Address: mkariuki@milligan.edu	Date: 11/05/03

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